

Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center
Avalanche Advisory

Contact: Kevin Davis (208) 265-6686, Ed Odegaard (208) 245-6209, or John Olson (208) 265-6608

This message available by calling (208) 765-7323 or toll-free at 1-866-489-8664.

E-mail address: kevingdavis@fs.fed.us, eodegaard@fs.fed.us, jrolson@fs.fed.us

Good Morning, this is the Idaho Panhandle avalanche advisory, valid for today, February 26th, 2010. This report does not apply to local ski areas within the forecast region and will remain in effect through midnight, February 26th. Thanks to Selkirk Powder Company and Schweitzer Ski Patrol for their observations yesterday. This advisory is sponsored by Idaho Parks and Recreation. Free snowmobile avalanche class in Priest Lake Next weekend. It should be a hoot and if you're not familiar with the country up there this would be a good chance to break into something new and learn how to do it safely. Give me a call if you're interested.

WEATHER

We have been getting a smattering of snow throughout our forecast region this week and that is following a period of high pressure. Observers and forecasters have been reporting instability associated with new snow layering, especially where windloaded the new snow over the Tuesday crust is showing signs of weakness. Snotel sites are showing accumulations of 4-5 inches since Tuesday evening at many of the higher locations. Westerly wind accompanied the passage of this system so watch for lee aspects to be loaded. The NWS is calling for mostly cloudy skies today, a slim chance of snow, mountain temperatures at or above freezing, and moderate winds out of the S/SE. Tonight the chance of snow increases with an inch of snow possible to the south and a couple of inches predicted to the north. Winds will continue from the south and temperatures will be in the high 20s. The outlook for Saturday and Sunday calls for a likely chance of snow with temperatures reaching above freezing with rain possible and moderate winds shifting to a westerly flow. By Sunday the models show a mild high pressure ridge settling over North Idaho that is expected to bring partly cloudy skies. **The avalanche danger will remain on windloaded aspects for the outlook period.**

Avalanche conditions for the Selkirk and Cabinet Mountains are rated as MODERATE on wind-loaded aspects greater than 35 degrees above 5,000 feet.

Natural avalanches are unlikely and human triggered avalanches are possible.

Avalanche conditions are rated as LOW on slopes less than 35 degrees. Natural and human triggered avalanches are unlikely.

Snowpack

In the Selkirk Mountains yesterday observers found clean shears in the upper 1 foot of the pack above and below the firm ice crust. The crust is supportive but be cautious where the margins of the crust are thinner. The new snow of the past 48 hours is not bonded well to the ice crust and where it is windloaded sloughs were noted that could

trigger this slab of new snow over the crust. More snow could create an increased avalanche danger especially if it is heavier and where windloaded.

Terrain

Pockets of Considerable avalanche danger can exist so be cautious particularly on NE-SE aspects for the next 24-48 hours. Winds will be blowing enough to continue to load lee aspects. Surface conditions will be variable because of this and you could easily find yourself going from a firm windslab to a deep pillow very quickly.

Avalanche conditions for the St. Regis Basin are rated as MODERATE on wind-loaded aspects greater than 35 degrees above 5,000 feet. Natural avalanches are unlikely and human triggered avalanches are possible. **Avalanche conditions are rated as LOW on slopes less than 35 degrees.** Natural and human triggered avalanches are unlikely.

Snowpack

Dan noticed a natural avalanche on a windloaded slope in the Basin yesterday and figures that it released in the new snow over the Tuesday ice crust. Although the avalanche danger is higher on these loaded slopes he noted that travel was most safe. Your main concern today and this weekend will be the precipitation. Rain will load the upper weak layer rapidly and heavy snow will tend to increase the avalanche danger also so check the slab conditions often as you travel.

Terrain

Lee aspects will be getting loaded more than others this weekend so pay attention when venturing on to NE-SE slopes. Surface conditions will vary with aspect so expect the avalanche danger to change abruptly in places. If the temperatures warm or snow turns to rain get off steep slopes and check snow stability often.

Avalanche conditions for the St. Joe Mountains are rated as MODERATE on wind-loaded aspects greater than 35 degrees above 5,000 feet. Natural avalanches are unlikely and human triggered avalanches are possible. **Avalanche conditions are rated as LOW on slopes less than 35 degrees.** Natural and human triggered avalanches are unlikely.

Snowpack

Ed hit the slopes on Wednesday and got out to Dismal Lake at 6,000 feet. He noted numerous crusts in the pack that had mostly consolidated and showed hard shears with moderate to hard shears. His main concern was the 4 inches of new snow over the ice crust on easterly aspects. This layer could get loaded with new snow and create more touchy conditions so you'll want to check that layer, especially if it loads with heavy snow or rain.

Terrain

If you get into the high country, above 6,000 feet, Ed noticed that the layering and stability was more variable. Windloading will be more pronounced and you'll notice that the variability in surface conditions will change more rapidly. Get off steep slopes if it warms considerably or if precipitation turns to rain.

The next advisory will be issued on Friday, March 5th, 2010.

If you have a group or club that is interested in more education on avalanche safety we will be available for free avalanche awareness classes beginning in December, so feel free to give us a call. As usual we would appreciate hearing from anyone who happens to observe any recent avalanche activity while out in the backcountry or just wants to let us know what is going on in their area. You can reach Kevin Davis in Sandpoint by calling (208) 265-6686.

Avalanche conditions change for better or worse continually. Backcountry travelers should be prepared to assess current conditions for themselves, plan their routes of travel accordingly, and never travel alone. Backcountry travelers can reduce their exposure to avalanche hazards by utilizing timbered trails and ridge routes and by avoiding open and exposed terrain with slope angles of 30 degrees or more. Backcountry travelers should carry the necessary avalanche rescue equipment such as a shovel, avalanche probe or probe ski poles, a rescue beacon and a well-equipped first aid kit.

Have a safe and pleasant weekend.